

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 DHA-02 ORM-02 OES-06 AID-05

SCA-01 EUR-12 PC-01 /061 W

----- 002005

R 030800Z JUL 76

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, SREF, AG, SS

SUBJECT: SAHARA: JOURNALISTS OBSERVATIONS ON SAHRAOUI REFUGEES

1. IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF JULY 1, VISITING AMERICAN JOURNALIST MADE FOLLOWING OBSERVATIONS ABOUT POLISARIO AND SITUATION OF REFUGEES IN WESTERN ALGERIA:

A. THERE ARE NOW 18 SAHRAOUI REFUGEE CAMPS IN ALGERIA WITH CLAIMED POPULATION OF 50,000. CAMPS RUN ENTIRELY BY SAHRAOUI AND FEW ALGERIANS IN EVIDENCE.

B. CONDITIONS IN CAMPS GRAVE. CHILDREN SHOWED SIGNS OF ACUTE UNDERNOURISHMENT AND PERSONS INTERVIEWED SAID THAT CHILD DEATHS, ALTHOUGH NOT AS FREQUENT AS IN PERIOD IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING MOROCCAN OCCUPATION, WERE STILL STEADY, MORE OR LESS DAILY, OCCURRENCE. SANITATION FACILITIES NON-EXISTENT, AND SINCE THERE NO ELECTRICITY, NO POSSIBILITY OF REFRIGERATION. ALTHOUGH SOME TRADITIONAL AND MODERN TENTS IN EVIDENCE, MUCH OF REFUGEE POPULATION LIVING UNDER IMPROVISED SHELTERS MADE OF RAGS. MAJOR FATAL DISEASE AT MOMENT IS MEASLES.

C. SUPPLY OF WATER, FOODSTUFFS AND MEDICINE MAJOR PROBLEM. TRANSPORT IS INADEQUATE AND QUANTITIES OF GOODS BEING DELIVERED INSUFFICIENT TO COVER DAILY NEEDS. WATER IS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SHORT IN TOWN OF TINDOUF ITSELF, AND ALGERIANS THEREFORE

RELUCTANT TO ALLOW ADEQUATE DELIVERIES TO CAMPS. THIS HAS CAUSED FRICTION WITH SAHRAOUI. RED CROSS AND OTHER SHIPMENTS OF MEDICINE ARRIVE PERIODICALLY, BUT HIGH PERCENTAGE OF VACCINES GENERALLY GO TO WASTE BECAUSE OF LACK OF REFRIGERATION. "CLINICS" IN CAMPS THEREFORE NOTHING MORE THAN DISPENSARIES FOR ASPIRINS AND OTHER VERY BASIC ITEMS.

C. CAMPS' POPULATION APPEARS LARGELY FROM FORMER SPANISH SAHARA REGION NOT, AS HAS BEEN ASSERTED, FROM OTHER PARTS OF CONTINENT. (JOURNALIST'S REASONING ON THIS POINT WAS THAT EVEN HARD - PRESSED SAHELIAN WOULD NOT AGREE TO LIVE IN SUCH CONDITIONS AND THAT KNOWLEDGE OF SPANISH SEEMED WUITE GENERALIZED IN CAMPS.)

E. AMERICAN-MADE JEEPS, SAID TO BE CAPTURED FROM MOROCCANS, IN EVIDENCE. (JOURNALIST ESTIMATED NUMBER OF THESE VEHICLES AT 20.)

F. VAROUS INHABITANTS OF CAMPS RECOUNTED SAME HORROR STORIES OF MOROCCAN PILLAGE. MURDER AND RAPE THAT HAVE APPEARED IN ALGERIAN PRESS. MOROCCAN PRISONERS INTERVIEWED STRESSED THEIR TOTAL, PRIOR IGNORANCE OF TRUE SITUATION IN SAHARA.

2. JOURNALIST ALSO IMPRESSED BY APPARENT LACK OF ALGERIAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN TINDOUF.

3. COMMENT: WE SEE NO REASON TO DOUBT THAT CONDITIONS IN CAMPS ARE MORE OR LESS AS DESCRIBED BY JOURNALIST. ALGERIAN LOGISTIC CAPABILITIES STRETCHED TO BREAKING POINT IN SUPPLYING THEIR FORCES IN SOUTH, AND PROBABLY NOT MUCH LEFT OVER FOR REFUGEES. LYNE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REFUGEE CAMPS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 JUL 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: saccheem
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976ALGIER01682
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760258-0592
From: ALGIERS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760792/aaaaddfn.tel
Line Count: 91
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: saccheem
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <10 MAY 2004 by buchant0>; APPROVED <23 SEP 2004 by saccheem>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SAHARA: JOURNALISTS OBERVATIONS ON SAHRAOUI REFUGEES
TAGS: PFOR, SREF, AG, SS
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006